



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Ms. Eshoo:

DEC 13 2019

Thank you for your letter of November 5 regarding the October 31 attack on Our Lady of Salvation Catholic Church in Baghdad and U.S. policy on Iraq's religious minorities.

We strongly condemn the October 31 targeted attack on Iraqi Christians in their place of worship, as well as the additional attacks on Christian community members that followed. We agree that this community—and other minority communities—are extremely vulnerable and need specific attention. We remain determined in the wake of these attacks to continue our efforts to assist this community. To address their unique and specific needs, the U.S. Government (USG) utilizes all available diplomatic, economic, and security resources. We also partner with, and push, the Government of Iraq (GOI) to maximize its efforts to protect its minority communities. In implementing our strategy for improving the situation of vulnerable minorities in Iraq, the Department of State has at its disposal a basket of policy, security and assistance initiatives, several of which are discussed below.

Despite the overall positive security trends in Iraq, we agree that more needs to be done, including additional efforts to protect the Christian minority. We are working with the GOI through our Security Agreement (SA) to advise, train, and assist Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) to increase their effectiveness in ensuring the safety and security of the Iraqi population throughout Iraq. We have been pleased to see the GOI respond to many of our calls for action, including additional protection at churches. In his visit to Our Lady of Salvation Catholic Church following the attack, Prime Minister Maliki pledged to refurbish the church and to provide compensation for the victims. Rest assured that we will hold the Maliki government to this pledge. We are utilizing our SA with the GOI to partner with ISF and Kurdish Peshmerga to promote security—and our presence—in the Disputed Internal Boundary (DIBs) areas. We believe minorities are at times caught in the middle of the Arab-Kurd dispute and believe this focus is extremely important.

The Honorable

Anna Eshoo,

House of Representatives.

In the aftermath of the October 31 church attack, Embassy Baghdad officials at all levels engaged Iraqi interlocutors regarding protecting and assisting the Christian community in Iraq. The Ambassador reached out to Monsignor Pius Kasha of Our Lady of Salvation Catholic Church; consulted with Yonadam Kanna, a member of Iraq's Council of Representatives (COR) and a recognized leader of Iraq's Christian community; discussed ways to promote interfaith reconciliation dialogue with Canon Andrew White, vicar of Saint George's Anglican Church in Baghdad and President of the Foundation for Relief and Reconciliation in the Middle East; and raised U.S. concerns for the safety of Iraq's Christians almost daily in his discussions with Prime Minister Maliki. Other embassy officials met separately with the head of the Christian Endowment regarding how the agency could increase its assistance to the Christian community, and with the Deputy Minister of Migration and Displaced Persons regarding the Ministry's services to displaced Christians.

As you know, Iraq's minorities make up a disproportionately large percentage of its refugee population. The USG is the largest contributor to a wide range of international assistance and protection programming in Iraq and in countries hosting Iraqi refugees, which Iraqi Christians as well as other minorities are encouraged to access. This assistance, which includes shelter, food, health care, and education support amounted to more than \$370 million this year. We take an active role in assisting resettlement efforts for those most vulnerable Iraqis who choose to leave Iraq and are not able to return. Since 2007, the U.S. has resettled over 23,000 Iraqi Christians, approximately 40 percent of the total number of Iraqis resettled to the United States.

On the programmatic front, we provide significant targeted assistance to vulnerable minority communities. We have begun scrutinizing more carefully than ever the organizations that apply for assistance through Congressional minority directives to ensure that the funding reaches its desired recipients. The projects we fund range from small to large scale assistance. Projects have included short-term humanitarian projects, education and essential service initiatives, as well as economic development projects to support urgent income generation efforts. Iraq-based community groups work with the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) to develop proposals that meet their specific needs. Many who receive this assistance prefer not to publicize the assistance they receive due to concerns about security, and we honor this preference. Nonetheless, we have encouraged our PRTs to take the initiative in ensuring that the largest number of groups possible are made aware of the assistance opportunities that are available to them.

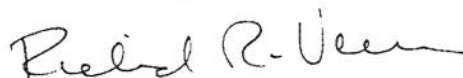
In ongoing discussions about the future civilian presence in Iraq, State has placed a high priority on minority issues. Both of the Embassy Branch Offices we will open in Iraq by October 2011 will be located in the DIBs areas (specifically Ninewa and Kirkuk provinces) where many minority communities are located. Continued outreach and support for these communities, currently conducted by our PRTs, will be one of the primary charges of these provincial sites.

We recognize the value of U.S.-based Iraqi communities in these efforts and often engage with Diaspora communities in the U.S. On November 3, as part of his continuing work as the Department's Iraq Minorities Coordinator with Iraqi minority communities both here and in Iraq, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State (DAS) for Iraq Michael Corbin held a conference call with Diaspora community members. This month he will travel to Detroit and Chicago to discuss USG efforts to assist Iraq's minorities with members of the Diaspora. We will continue to encourage them to inform their Iraqi contacts of our assistance initiatives and will relay their concerns to our Embassy in Baghdad.

Iraqi leaders reached an agreement on a national unity government on November 13. We believe this is a significant achievement and that a strong, inclusive government that includes all of Iraq's communities will help promote the long-term viability of all groups. To specifically support the minority voice in the new COR, the Department of State is funding programs to directly assist minority COR members in forming a common platform to mainstream minority issues on the national policy agenda.

As you note in your letter, Secretary Clinton's appointment of DAS Michael Corbin as the Department's Iraq Minorities Coordinator was a significant development. DAS Corbin and his staff work with the Ambassador in Baghdad and the highest levels of the Department to ensure that minority issues in Iraq remain at the forefront of policy discussions and decision making. We will remain focused on these issues and look forward to continuing our conversation with you on this very important topic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Richard R. Verma". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Richard" and last name "Verma" clearly distinguishable.

Richard R. Verma  
Assistant Secretary  
Legislative Affairs